

Presenter: Commander, Coalition Air Force Training Team, Maj. Gen. Robert R. Allardice, March 17, 2008

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DoD News Briefing with Maj. Gen. Allardice from Iraq

(Note: The general appears via teleconference from Iraq.)

COL. GARY KECK (director, Department of Defense Press Office ): Well, good morning, everyone, and welcome to the DOD briefing room. I'm Colonel Gary Keck, the director of the Press Office, and it's my privilege today to introduce to you Major General Robert R. Allardice, who's commanding the Coalition Air Force Transition Team in Iraq. And General Allardice will be leaving his position very shortly, and he's been there since March 2007. So he's decided and has agreed to tell us some of the events that have happened during his tour and his efforts to help with the development of the Iraqi Air Force.

So with that, sir, I'm going very quickly make sure you can hear me. Sir, can you hear me all right?

GEN. ALLARDICE: I can hear you loud and clear.

COL. KECK: (Off mike) -- Sir. With that, I'm going to turn it over to you for whatever opening comments you have, and then we'll go into Q&A.

GEN. ALLARDICE: Okay, great.

Well, good morning to everybody back in the United States. It's really a pleasure and honor to take this time to talk with you. You know, as I come into my 12th month and I'm beginning to start my changeover with my replacement, I find myself reflecting on what's happened over the last 12 months and where the Iraqi Air Force has come.

And if you think back to March of 2007, it was actually a pretty dangerous place in Iraq. The violence level was way up. In fact, when I showed up, the Iraqi Air Force was just barely starting their growth spurt. And I would tell you now -- report to you now that thanks to your United States Air Force, largely, with an infusion of about a total of 360 people and a lot of hard work on the Iraqi and Multinational Security Transition Corps here, we've actually seen the Iraqi Air Force grow significantly in the past 12 months.

A year ago the Iraqi Air Force was only flying about 30 sorties a week. We don't really know how many they were flying, because they didn't have a(n) air operations center to command and control their sorties. A year ago, the Iraqi Air Force had no Air Force Academy. They had no entry-level basic training. They had no technical training school, and they had about 28 airplanes that they flew pretty much when they wanted to fly.

By the end of 2007, the Iraqi Air Force was flying about 300 sorties a week. That's a 1,000 percent increase in their sortie rate. They had increased the number of aircraft to, at the time, 56. The Iraqi Air Force had stood up the Iraqi Air Force Academy and graduated their first class of officers.

They've graduated their first class of basic trainees, and they've graduated several people from technical training courses which are required to build an air force.

Just, in summary, with that, what I would say is, they've -- the Iraqi Air Force began the movement from just a dream on paper to a force that will eventually become a credible air force serving the nation of Iraq.

Now, I want to be clear that in this journey, where we're focusing on today is on building a(n) air force that will support the counterinsurgency effort, and you may ask me questions about that and beyond that. But the thing that I really want to leave you with is that this great movement forward is a remarkable thing to see. It has improved. Since the violence level has come down, we've had many more people have come back into the Iraqi Air Force, and what I'm very proud is how our United States Air Force airmen have supported that effort.

In January of 2007, the Iraqi Air Force had about 700 people in the air force, all from the former Iraqi Air Force. Today the Iraqi Air Force just over 1,350 people in it, and there's an additional between 400 and 450 students that you count on top of that. So if you add those all up, it's about 1,800 people total. That's a remarkable increase in the force in such a short time. And so as we focus on generating an air force, building an air force, training the people of the air force, we are also focusing on building the institution that can actually perform the management leadership functions of that air force. And it's a pretty exciting thing, but it's also a very challenging effort.

And I will tell you with that as my opening comments, I look forward to questions you may have.

COL. KECK: Okay, thank you, sir. We appreciate it. And let's go ahead and begin.

Courtney?

Q Hi, General. This is Courtney Kube from NBC News. We hear quite a bit about the capabilities of the Iraqi Air Force to transport people and goods, but can you talk a little bit about what the specific offensive capabilities are of the air force? Of the 1,300 people that you mentioned, how many of them are conducting -- if any, are conducting offensive operations, and what are the assets that they have?

GEN. ALLARDICE: Yeah, thanks. The -- initially, what I would tell you is that while we focus on trying to build a counterinsurgency force, our main effort is -- from a coalition perspective, initially, to build up the training capability of the air force. So we started pilot training, which is a remarkable thing in and of itself. In October of 2007, we actually stood up a pilot training school and started with just initially 10 people, four brand-new lieutenants and six older folks, and now we have 18 people in training, and that's where a lot of our effort is.

So that's not a direct answer to your question, but I wanted you to know that first you have to build the training base before you can move into the more aggressive attack base.

On your specific question on offensive capability, today the most offensive that the Iraqi air force has, they have helicopters that can shoot rockets. To be honest, they're not shooting the rockets with those aircraft yet. They will by the end of the year. But what we're doing is we're focusing on battlefield mobility, moving troops into the fight, and doing surveillance and reconnaissance today, and then we are training the Iraqis or beginning the effort to train the Iraqis to be able to coordinate strikes from the air to the ground. And by the end of this year, they'll have the capability to provide some precision strike, mostly in support of the counterterrorist effort but also more broadly to the broad army.

So today, trigger pullers, nobody doing that, effectively. By the end of the year, I would say a good percentage of the force will be focused on that.

COL. KECK: AI?

Q General, this is Al Pessin from Voice of America. Considering what you just said, it sounds like, and tell me if it would be correct to say that the Iraqis are going to need U.S. and coalition air support for quite a number of years to come. Can you put a number on that number of years? And can you give us some idea what sort of purchasing program they would need, what type of aircraft, what kind of money are we talking about over what period of time to have a self-sufficient air force?

GEN. ALLARDICE: Yeah, I wouldn't put years on this, because I think that you have to be very careful. And what we've learned in this counterinsurgency, and it's really true in warfare in general, is you don't know what's going to happen beyond about six months. You know, who could have predicted?

In fact, I will say if you'd asked me in March of 2007 did I expect I would be able to actually stand up a flight training school in October in the middle of a counterinsurgency and actually recruit pilots to come do that and be able to train them

during this counterinsurgency and be at the level of sortie rate we are today and be able to focus on the types of training maneuvers we have today, in the middle of the counterinsurgency, if you'd asked me that a year ago I would have told you absolutely not; I'm going to try to do that, I would say, but nah, I wouldn't bet on it. But yet today we are performing at that level. So putting a timeline on something in the counterinsurgency is very difficult and problematic.

Let me say one thing about air support in a counterinsurgency. People often want to focus on are you killing somebody, are you shooting from the air; but frankly, from my perspective, that's a very, very small -- important, but very small -- contribution of air power in a counterinsurgency.

Think of this. Last September you had a cholera outbreak up in Sulimaniyah, and Iraqi Air Force C-130s, flown by Iraqi crews, were hauling the medicine up there to take care of those people. When you had a bombing at Karbala and crowds were panicking, you had the Iraqi Air Force scramble their own Huey aircraft with their own flag on the bottom of that helicopter flying over those crowds telling those crowds that the Iraqi government is here to support them. When you have the Iraqi Army needing supplies carried somewhere or you have down in Basra something going on, you have Iraqi helicopters flying over the city providing presence from the government and communicating to the people of Iraq that their government is building up an air force that is there to support them.

So in my mind and, I think, certainly in the people who study counterinsurgencies, it is the visible contribution of the central government supporting the people, and what better way do you have to be visible than air power, and oh, by the way, making very significant contributions in terms of the surveillance, the transportation and the visibility.

Something I often mention in this kind of a crowd, but it's very important to the Iraqis, is -- the first time I flew on a Huey was last summer, about July time frame. The first time I flew on a Huey, it was the look on the face of the Iraqis that I could see as I flew over them that made me fully appreciate the impact of having an Iraqi aircraft in the air visible to the Iraqi people. That, in my mind, is more important than shooting somebody from an airplane, although that's also an important part of it.

So, how long? I think that by the end of 2008, the year we're in now, we will have a significant kinetic contribution to the counterinsurgency from the Iraqi Air Force. Our focus today is to help the Iraqis, assist the Iraqis as they build up their own contribution to buying the force and building up the force. By the end of this year, they expect to have about 3,000 people, which is double what we have today. By the end of 2009, their program is to have about 6,000 people in the air force. And I would offer that that's about the break point for where they really need to have their counterinsurgency force.

They have 59 aircraft today. By the end of this year they'll have about a thousand (sic\hundred) aircraft. Their capacity to provide surveillance and intelligence from the sky will triple by the end of this year, and again, they'll have more of a direct attack capability. So I think that it's safe -- a fairly comfortable prediction on my part that by the end of the year they'll have the parts assembled, by the end of '09 they'll be in a very comfortable position to support the counterinsurgency effort, and then it's a matter of national will on their part and their capacity to move to the next step, which is the defense of their air sovereignty.

Q General, if I could just follow up and check those figures. You said they have 59 aircraft now and will have a thousand by the end of the year? Did I get those numbers right? And can you tell me what type of aircraft they -- (off mike)?

GEN. ALLARDICE: Yeah, sure. No, it was nearly a hundred, please. Nearly a hundred. If I said that other number, I apologize.

So today, they have about 59 aircraft. I could run down the numbers individually, but let me just give you a general sense. About half of their numbers overall will be helicopters. Those helicopters, by the end of this year they'll be doing medevac missions here, if not this next month -- by the end of next month, and then the other helicopters they'll have will be doing battlefield mobility and have some form of an attack capability. In 2009, they actually start to receive aircraft that are specifically designed for the counterterrorist mission, and so they're a more complex -- a more sophisticated aircraft.

They also will have, by the end of this year, will complete their propeller training capability, and so they -- today, in fact this week, we received the eighth Cessna 172. By the end of the year, they'll have 12 of those and next week, they're supposed to get their first training Cessna 208. They'll have five of those by the end of this year. They already have the King Air, which they use for light transportation and training.

And before the summer, they're supposed to start getting the first of five deliveries this year of airplanes that they purchased through the foreign military sales program, King Airs with -- that are intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance aircraft, and these are very sophisticated aircraft that will provide them a great capability. They have C-130E models today, three of them, that they use for providing a little bit of heavier lift capability. They are trying to develop a way to get more lift capability. I don't know that they'll be able to have those by the end of this year, but certainly by 2009, I would expect them to see that.

Their training fleet -- I also missed -- their training fleet for helicopters will expand. They have five training helicopters today; by the end of this year, they'll have 20 training helicopters. So their training capacity, by the end of this year, they'll have the capacity to train about 240 pilots a year, which is a pretty substantial local capability.

Q Thank you.

COL. KECK: (Off mike.)

Q General, this is Marc Schanz at Air Force Magazine. You alluded to precision strikes earlier in the briefing. What specific capability are you talking about? What are they going to have, a turboprop COIN aircraft or something else?

GEN. ALLARDICE: The precision strike -- you know, a Hellfire is a precision strike capability. The platform, whether it's propeller or rotary or a jet, any of those may have the capacity to deliver a Hellfire-type missile. So, now, what we would offer to the Iraqis and the way we advise them is in the counterinsurgency battle, we are trying to help them, first off, develop their own requirements. We help them with the

requirements, but then submit those requirements, you know, into an acquisition process that works for them and is a relatively pure, systematic process for them.

And in that, what we recommend to them for the counterinsurgency is they need a capability that has a long loiter time, relatively simple to maintain, and will deliver a strike capability that is relatively precise. And so, they do have -- by the end of this year, they'll have a caravan that has the capability to shoot, they'll have helicopters that has the capability to shoot. And there has been speculation -- and they continue to develop -- but they have not moved forward and agreed to -- a light attack capability. And they have looked at the requirements for that.

They've not made any final decisions on that, but that's certainly something that they're looking at.

COL. KECK: Courtney, go ahead.

Q Hey, General, it's Courtney from NBC again. You mentioned that the Iraqi Air Force intelligence and surveillance capabilities would increase by the end of the year or at the end of year. Is there -- are there any plans to -- for them to purchase any UAVs? And if so, can you tell us a little bit about that?

And then on the maintenance side, can you update us on where they stand as far as their ability -- the Iraqi Air Force ability to maintain their planes themselves, maintain their aircraft and the number of mechanics that they have?

GEN. ALLARDICE: On the UAV, I don't know of any plans they have on UAV right now. I would tell you that the Cessna Caravan is almost like a manned Predator. It's a cheap platform. It provides the same coverage that our -- relatively -- that our Predator provides for them. And it's also the same airplane that they're going to use -- same type of airplane they're going to use in training. It has the same engine on it that the King Air has on it. It's really a neat, unique capability, because they are -- they have multiple platforms now that have the same engine, which obviously -- you asked the maintenance question -- it simplifies the maintenance problem for them. So we're pretty impressed with the way they're pursuing that.



I'll tell you, maintenance question is a really good question, because, you know, our United States airmen -- we have over 30 support specialties that have come in to spread out across the Iraqi Air Force to provide them advice and guidance at each level. And what most people don't appreciate is the strength of our United States Air Force back in the United States -- the strength of our Air Force resides in this tremendous national capability to develop, field and sustain our aircraft. And that is a national treasure. And I tell you, even though I appreciate it -- I worked in that field in general -- coming here to this nation and trying to help them build their capacity to develop, field and sustain their aircraft, I appreciate more what we have in our nation.

And so we are working with them to build up their maintenance, their flight line maintenance. I have U.S. Air Force airmen that work side by side with the Iraqi airmen to develop this capability. We graduated the first 116 warrant officers in January, which were the -- although we recruit some of the former members of the Iraqi Air Force -- they do; they recruit them to come in and help fix airplanes -- it's it's this new blood, these young men that come into their air force, these 116 that we are training now on basic aircraft maintenance school, that will begin moving forward with their ability to work on airplanes in the flight line.

Their real backshop capability today is -- clearly resides in a contract logistics concept. And while they would like to migrate to a greater dependence on their own organic -- meaning their own people -- to do that, they are a couple of years away from really being able to pick that up, just because of the length of time.

Let me give you an example. In my United States Air Force, when I take a young airman fresh out of basic, that young woman or young man that comes out of basic is going to take anywhere from five to seven years to become an expert working on the airplane in their career field.

And so this is very challenging work. And what I am mostly -- is impressed with how quickly the Iraqis are able to pick this up.

Q General, it's Al Pessin again. I was going to ask you a question along those lines. Yes, about the maintenance folks but especially about the pilots. What are you finding in terms of the educational level and the pool of potential recruits that you have, especially on the higher-end jobs, like pilots?

GEN. ALLARDICE: What we have found in Iraq is that, first off, not surprisingly, if you let the Iraqis do the recruiting and let them go after the right kind of people, they're pretty good at it. Remember, they at one time had the sixth-largest air force in the world. They had a thousand aircraft. They know how to have an air force. And they know how to recruit, they know how to screen for them. And so we want to help them develop the processes that will work for them to go after these kind of people.

The thing that works for them in these technical areas is to let them recruit from high school graduates, vocational technical -- vo- tech type school graduates, that, and then we also go after university graduates. And they have a dual-track program, essentially. If they get a university graduate, they can commission that person in a six-month program and then make them an officer and take them on to a flight training school. If it's a vo-tech or a high school graduate, then they put them in a one-year commissioning program for pilot training.

The next hurdle for them is, in order to be a pilot, they need to be able to speak English at a fairly high level, about a 12th-grade education in the United States. And so we have to put them through an English language training course. What we find is that a great number of the new lieutenants that came out of university have already studied English, and so their learning curve is pretty quick and they come up to speed and we can put them into pilot training earlier. Some of the younger ones who came right out of high school, it can take them a year to develop the English skills that they require to move forward.

So the numbers I have that we have today are really encouraging. I'll tell you, let me put it this way, it's the look in the eye of these young men when they come into the air force and they graduate from these programs is where you see how determined they are to succeed in building their new air force. So, you know, it's not for everybody, but they certainly have the capacity to recruit, they have the education base to draw from, and the people that they are recruiting seem to have the will to succeed.

Q General, this is Marc Schanz again. Could you give us some kind of a metric or measure of what missions the Iraqi Air Force are performing now that used to be performed by U.S. Air Force or coalition aircraft, like some sort of yardstick? Like, you know, if the Iraqi Air Force was not flying, how many more missions would the Air Force be flying?

GEN. ALLARDICE: I had difficulty understanding that, but I think what you asked me is what missions is the Iraqi air force performing today in lieu of coalition. I think that's what I understood. Is that right?

Q Yes, sir.

GEN. ALLARDICE: Yeah, sure. First off, transportation is -- we fight the war with transportation. Battlefield mobility is huge. And so the Iraqi Air Force, as they've come online with their helicopter force, their ability to move distinguished visitors around the battlefield, or army supplies around the battlefield, has transferred.

And what we do today is, the coalition still carries some of this. But we tell the coalition, don't accept a movement request until you have a denial from the Iraqis that they couldn't provide that particular service. We expect to exceed their capacity pretty quick. But still we want the Iraqis to go and ask for this.

Last month, of course, you heard about the fighting going on up north around Mosul. And the Iraqi C-130s moved supplies for the ministry of interior and the ministry of defense, to support that effort. And we have helicopters that fly missions up there to support that effort. That replaces convoys; it exposes their soldiers or potentially our soldiers at risk. So they are clearly part of that.

The other area that they have performed a great deal in is in this surveillance, you know, that we have several cases where they've caught pirates trying to smuggle oil, or they have patrolled, provided reconnaissance missions over the electrical lines or the borders of the nation, using their Cessna Caravan, and provide map footage, video footage, of where the power lines are having problems and a couple cases, you know, if people are working or not when they say they are.

So these are all areas that have a direct contribution. You know, I would say that at the senior level, they're very keenly interested in the contribution that the air force makes to the ministry of electricity and the ministry of oil to try to provide security to those by reconnaissance and surveillance of those areas. So those are really easy no-brainer areas.

COL. KECK: Okay, sir, we have come to the end of our half hour very quickly and we appreciate your time with us today. As is our tradition, we'd like to turn it back over to you for any final comments or thoughts you may have.

GEN. ALLARDICE: Thanks. I do.

First off, let me thank you all for what you're doing. Your questions and your persistence in trying to get the story out is remarkable. I appreciate it.

You know, every week I've been here, except for just three, I've sent newsletters back home. And what they tell me is that they really appreciate our media that are trying to tell the story of what we are accomplishing here in Iraq.

For me, I was asked a couple of months ago, what am I most proud of? And I just have to tell you all that you need to be proud of your American airmen, sailors and soldiers. I represent obviously the United States Air Force. But folks, what 360 airmen did this last year for the nation of Iraq is absolutely remarkable, and I cannot say enough about that.

And to put an exclamation point on this, you know, I fly a fair amount over Iraq and I fly over Baghdad. And I went from the International Zone over to Baghdad International Airport a couple of days ago. And as I was flying over Baghdad, looking down, what I noticed were children in schoolyards, children playing outside, children playing soccer.

It was about midmorning. And a year ago when I got here, there were no children playing in the streets. The people of Iraq were despondent, and the children were largely without hope. And I have to tell you that I'm incredibly proud to be part of a nation and an organization that have truly provided a(n) opportunity for the children to play in the playgrounds again.

Thanks a lot for your time.

COL. KECK: Thank you again, sir.

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